ELFRIDA,

A

DRAMATIC POEM.

[Price One Shilling and Sixpence.]

Juſt Publiſhed,

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DRAMATIC POEM.

Written on the MODEL of

The Ancient GREEK Tragedy.

By W. MASON, M. A.

THE EIGHTH EDITION.

LONDON:

Printed and Sold by R. HORSFIELD, in Ludgate-Street; T. CADELL, in the Strand; and W. TESSEYMAN, at York.

MDCCLXXIII.

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MDCCLXXII.

The ARGUMENT.

EDGAR *King of* England, *having heard the beauty of* ELFRIDA, *daughter of* ORGAR, *Earl of* Devonſhire, *highly celebrated*; *ſent his Favourite Miniſter* ATHELWOLD *to the father's caſtle, to diſcover whether ſhe was really ſo beautiful, as Fame reported her to be*; *and if ſhe was, to offer her his Crown in marriage.* ATHELWOLD, *on ſeeing her, fell violently in Love with her himſelf*; *and married her*; *conveying her ſoon after to his own caſtle in* Harewood Foreſt, *where he viſited her by ſtealth from court*; *and in his abſence left her with a train of* Britiſh *Virgins, who form the* CHORUS. *After three months,* ORGAR *diſapproving this confinement of his daughter, came diſguiſed to* Harewood *to diſcover the cauſe of it. His arrival opens the Drama. The incidents, which are produced by* ATHELWOLD's *return from court (who was abſent when* ORGAR *came to his caſtle) and afterwards by the unexpected viſit of the King, form the* EPISODE *of the Tragedy*; *the feigned pardon of* ATHELWOLD, *drawn from the King by the earneſt interceſſions of* ELFRIDA, *brings on the* PERIPETIA, *or change of fortune*; *and the ſingle combat between the King and* ATHELWOLD, *in which the latter is ſlain, occaſions* ELFRIDA *to take the vow, which completes the* CATASTROPHE.

PERSONS of the DRAMA.

ORGAR, Earl of Devonſhire.

CHORUS, of Britiſh Virgins.

ELFRIDA, Daughter to ORGAR.

ATHELWOLD, Huſband to ELFRIDA.

EDWIN, a Meſſenger.

EDGAR, King of England.

ORGAR, diſguiſed in a Peaſant's Habit, ſpeaks the Prologue.

SCENE, a Lawn before ATHELWOLD's Caſtle in *Harewood Foreſt.*

PERSONS of the DRAMA.

BRITISH MUSEUM

ELFRIDA,

A

DRAMATIC POEM.

ORGAR.

HOW nobly does this venerable wood,
Gilt with the glories of the orient ſun,
Emboſom yon fair manſion! The ſoft air
Salutes me with moſt cool and temp'rate breath;
And, as I tread, the flow'r-beſprinkled lawn
Sends up a gale of fragrance. I ſhould gueſs,
If e'er Content deign'd viſit mortal clime,
This was her place of deareſt reſidence.
Grant Heav'n! I find it ſuch. 'Tis now three months,
Since firſt Earl ATHELWOLD eſpous'd my daughter.
He then beſought me, for ſome little ſpace
The nuptials might be ſecret; many reaſons,
He ſaid, induc'd to this: I made no pauſe,
But, reſting on his prudence, to his will
Gave abſolute concurrence. Soon as married,
He to this ſecret ſeat convey'd ELFRIDA;
Convey'd her as by ſtealth, enjoy'd, and left her:
Yet not without I know not what excuſe
Of call to court, of EDGAR's royal friendſhip,
And England's welfare. To his prince he went:
And ſince, as by intelligence I gather,

He oft returns to this his cloyſter'd wife;
But ever with a privacy moſt ſtudied;
Borrowing diſguiſes till inventive art
Can ſcarce ſupply him with variety.
His viſits, as they're ſtol'n, are alſo ſhort;
Seldom beyond the circuit of one ſun:
Then back to court, while ſhe his abſence mourns
Full many a lonely hour. I brook not this.
Had ATHELWOLD eſpous'd ſome baſe-born peaſant,
This uſage had been apt: but when he took
My daughter to his arms, he took a virgin,
Thro' whoſe rich veins the blood of Britiſh Kings
Ran in unſullied ſtream. Her lineage ſure
Might give her place and notice with the nobleſt
In EDGAR's court. ELFRIDA's beauty too
(I ſpeak not from a father's fooliſh fondneſs)
Would ſhine amid the faireſt, and reflect
No vulgar glory on that beauty's maſter.
This act beſpeaks the madman. Who, that own'd
An em'rald, jaſper, or rich chryſolite,
Would hide its luſtre, or not bid it blaze
Conſpicuous on his brow? Haply ATHELWOLD
May have eſpous'd ſome other. 'Sdeath he durſt not.
My former feats in arms muſt have inform'd him,
That ORGAR, while he liv'd, would never prove
A traitor to his honour. If he has——
This aged arm is not ſo much unſtrung
By ſlack'ning years, but juſt revenge will brace it.
And, by yon awful heav'n—But hold, my rage.
I came to ſearch into this matter coolly.

Hence,

Hence, to conceal the father and the earl,
This pilgrim's ſtaff, and ſcrip, and all theſe marks
Of vagrant poverty.

CHORUS (within.)

Hail to thy living light, ambroſial Morn!
All hail thy roſeat ray!

ORGAR.

But hark, the ſound of ſweeteſt minſtrelſy
Breaks on mine ear. The females, I ſuppoſe,
Whom ATHELWOLD has left my child's attendants;
That, when ſhe wails the abſence of her lord,
Their lenient airs, and ſprightly-fancied ſongs,
May ſteal away her woes. See, they approach:
This grove ſhall ſhroud me till they ceaſe their ſtrain;
Then I'll addreſs them with ſome feigned tale.

[*He retires.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

Hail to thy living light,
Ambroſial Morn! all hail thy roſeat ray:
That bids young Nature all her charms diſplay
In varied beauty bright;
That bids each dewy-ſpangled flowret riſe,
And dart around its vermil dies;
Bids ſilver luſtre grace yon ſparkling tide,
That winding warbles down the mountain's ſide.
Away, ye Goblins all,
Wont the bewilder'd traveller to daunt;
Whoſe vagrant feet have trac'd your ſecret haunt
Beſide ſome lonely wall,

Or ſhatter'd ruin of a moſs-grown tow'r,
Where, at pale midnight's ſtilleſt hour,
Thro' each rough chink the ſolemn orb of night
Pours momentary gleams of trembling light.
Away, ye Elves, away:
Shrink at ambroſial Morning's living ray;
That living ray, whoſe pow'r benign
Unfolds the ſcene of glory to our eye,
Where, thron'd in artleſs majeſty,
The cherub Beauty ſits on Nature's ruſtic ſhrine.

CHORUS, ORGAR.

CHORUS.

Silence, my ſiſters. Whence this rudeneſs, ſtranger,
That thus has prompted thine unbidden ear
To liſten to our ſtrains?

ORGAR.

Your pardon, Virgins:
I meant not rudeneſs, tho' I dar'd to liſten;
For ah! what ear ſo fortify'd and barr'd
Againſt the force of powerful harmony,
But would with tranſport to ſuch ſweet aſſailants
Surrender its attention? Never yet
Have I paſs'd by the night-bird's fav'rite ſpray,
What time ſhe pours her wild and artleſs ſong,
Without attentive pauſe and ſilent rapture;
How could I then, with ſavage diſregard,
Hear voices tun'd by nature ſweet as her's,
Grac'd with all art's addition?

CHORUS.

Thy mean garb,
And this thy courtly phraſe but ill accord.
Whence, and what art thou, ſtranger?

ORGAR. —Virgins, know
Theſe limbs have oft been wrapt in richer veſt:
But what avails it now? all have their fate;
And mine has been moſt wretched.

CHORUS. May we aſk
What cruel cauſe—

ORGAR. No! let this chapleſs breaſt
Still hide the melancholy tale.

CHORUS. We know,
There oft is found an avarice in grief;
And the wan eye of Sorrow loves to gaze
Upon its ſecret hoard of treaſur'd woes
In pining ſolitude. Perhaps thy mind
Takes the ſame penſive caſt: if not, permit
That we, in ſocial ſympathy, may drop
The tender tear.

ORGAR. Ah! ill would it become ye,
To let the woes of ſuch a wretch as I am,
E'er dim your bright eyes with a pitying tear.

CHO-

CHORUS.

The eye, that will not weep another's ſorrow,
Should boaſt no gentler brightneſs than the glare,
That reddens in the eye-ball of the wolf.
Let us entreat—

ORGAR.

Know, Virgins, I was born
To ample property of lands and flocks,
On this ſide Tweeda's ſtream. My youth and vigour
Achiev'd full many a feat of martial proweſs:
Nor was my ſkill in chivalry unnoted
In the fair volume of my ſov'reign's love;
Who ever held me in his beſt eſteem,
And cloſeſt to his perſon. When he paid,
What all muſt pay, to fate; and ſhort-liv'd Edwy
Mounted the vacant throne, which now his brother
Fills (as loud fame reports) right royally;
I then, unfit for pageantry and courts,
Sat down in peace among my faithful vaſſals,
At my paternal ſeat. But ah! not long
Had I enjoy'd the ſweets of that receſs,
Ere by the ſavage inroads of baſe hinds,
That ſallied frequent from the Scotiſh heights,
My lands were all laid waſte, my people murder'd;
And I, thro' impotence of age unfit
To quell their brutal rage, was forc'd to drag
My mis'ries thro' the land, a friendleſs wand'rer.

CHO-

CHORUS.

We pity and condole thy wretched ſtate,
But we can do no more; which, on thy part,
Claims juſt returns of pity: for whoſe lot
Demands it more than theirs, whom fate forbids
To taſte the joys of courteous charity;
To wipe the trickling tears, which dew the cheek
Of palſied age; to ſmooth its furrow'd brow,
And pay its gray hairs each due reverence?
Yet ſuch delight we are forbid to taſte!
For 'tis our lord's command, that not a ſtranger,
However high or lowly his degree,
Have entrance at theſe gates.

ORGAR.

Who may this tyrant—

CHORUS.

Alas, no tyrant he; the more our wonder
At this harſh mandate: Tenderneſs and Pity
Have made his breaſt their home. He is a man
More apt, thro' inborn gentleneſs, to err
In giving mercy's tide too free a courſe,
Than with a thrifty and illiberal hand
To ſtint its channel. This his praiſe you'll hear
The univerſal theme in EDGAR's court:
For EDGAR ranks him firſt in his high favour;
Loads him with honours, which the Earl receives,
As does the golden cenſer frankincenſe,
Only to ſpread a ſacred gale of bleſſings
Around on all.

ORGAR.

Methinks, this pleaſing portrait
Bears ſtrong reſemblance of Lord ATHELWOLD.

CHORUS.

Himſelf: no Briton but has heard his fame.

ORGAR.

'Tis wondrous ſtrange; can you conceive no cauſe
For this his conduct?

CHORUS.

None, that we may truſt.

ORGAR.

Your garbs beſpeak you for the fair attendants
Of ſome illuſtrious dame, the wife, or ſiſter
Of this dread earl.

CHORUS.

On this head too, old man,
We are commanded a religious ſilence:
Which ſtrictly we obey; for well we know
Fidelity's a virtue that ennobles
Ev'n ſervitude itſelf: Farewell, depart
With our beſt wiſhes; we do treſpaſs much
To hold this open converſe with a ſtranger.

ORGAR.

Stay, Virgins, ſtay; have ye no friendly ſhed,
But bord'ring on your caſtle, where theſe limbs
Might lay their load of miſ'ry for an hour?

Have

Have ye no food, however mean and homely,
Wherewith I might ſupport declining nature?
Ev'n while I ſpeak, I find my ſpirits fail;
And well, full well, I know, theſe trembling feet,
Ere I can pace a hundred ſteps, will ſink
Beneath their wretched burthen.

CHORUS.

Piteous ſight!
What ſhall we do, my ſiſters? To admit
This man beneath the roof, would be to ſcorn
The Earl's ſtrict interdict; and yet my heart
Bleeds to behold that white, old, rev'rend head
Bow'd with ſuch miſery.—Yes, we muſt aid him.
Hie thee, poor Pilgrim, to yon neighb'ring bow'r,
O'er which an old oak ſpreads his awful arm,
Mantled in browneſt foliage, and beneath
The ivy, gadding from th' untwiſted ſtem,
Curtains each verdant ſide. There thou may'ſt reſt,
There too, perchance, ſome of our ſiſterhood
May bring thee ſpeedy ſuſtenance.

ORGAR.

Kind Heav'n!
Reward———

CHORUS.

Ah! ſtay not here to thank us,
But haſte to give thine age this meet repoſe.
That done, we do conjure thee leave the place
With cautious ſecreſy; for was it known,
That thus we treſpaſs'd on our lord's command,
The conſequence were fatal.

ORGAR.

Faireſt Maid!
Think not I'll baſely draw down puniſhments
On my preſervers. I retire. May bleſſings
Show'r'd from yon fount of Bliſs repay your kindneſs.

[*Exit Orgar.*

SEMICHORUS.

Yes, ſiſters, yes, when pale diſtreſs
Implores your aiding hand,
Let not a partial faithfulneſs,
Let not a mortal's vain command
Urge you to break th' unalterable laws
Of heav'n-deſcended Charity.
Ah! follow ſtill the ſoft-ey'd Deity;
For know, each path ſhe draws,
Along the plain of life,
Meets at the central dome of heart-felt joy.
Follow the ſoft-ey'd Deity;
She bids ye, as ye hope for bleſſings, bleſs.
Aid then the gen'ral cauſe of gen'ral happineſs.

SEMICHORUS.

Humanity, thy awful ſtrain
Shall ever greet our ear,
Sonorous, ſweet, and clear.
And as amid the ſprightly-ſwelling train
Of dulcet notes, that breathe
From flute or lyre,
The deep baſe rolls its manly melody,
Guiding the tuneful choir;

So

So thou, Humanity, ſhalt lead along
Th' accordant paſſions in their moral ſong,
And give our mental concert trueſt harmony.

CHORUS.

But ſee, ELFRIDA comes.
Should we again reſume our former ſtrain,
And hail the Morn that paints her waking beauties:
Or ſtay her gentle bidding? Rather ſtay;
For, as I think, ſhe ſeems in penſive mood:
And there are times, when to the ſorrowing ſoul
Ev'n harmony is harſhneſs.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

Oh my Virgins,
With what a leaden and retarding weight,
Does Expectation load the wing of Time?
Alas, how have theſe three dull hours crept on,
Since firſt the crimſon mantle of the morn
Skirted yon gay horizon? Say, my Friends,
Have I miſcounted? Did not ATHELWOLD
At parting fix this morn for his return?
This dear long-wiſh'd for morn? He did, he did,
And ſeal'd it with a kiſs; I could not err.
And yet he comes not. He was wont outſtrip
The ſun's moſt early ſpeed, and make its riſing
To me unwiſh'd and needleſs. This delay
Creates ſtrange doubts and ſcruples in my breaſt.
Courts throng with beauties, and my ATHELWOLD
Has a ſoft, ſuſceptible heart, as prone

To yield its love to ev'ry ſparkling eye,
As is the muſk-roſe to diſpenſe its fragrance
To ev'ry whiſp'ring breeze; perhaps he's falſe,
Perhaps ELFRIDA's wretched.

CHORUS.

See, ELFRIDA,
Ah ſee! how round yon branching elm the ivy
Claſps its green folds, and poiſons what ſupports it,
Not leſs injurious to the ſhoots of Love
Is ſickly jealouſy.

ELFRIDA.

My mind nor pines
With jealouſy, nor reſts ſecure in peace.
Who loves, muſt fear; and ſure who loves like me,
Muſt greatly fear.

CHORUS.

Yet whence the cauſe? Your Earl
Has ever yet (this little breach excepted)
Been punctual to appointment. Did his eye
Glow with leſs ardent paſſion when he left you,
Than at the firſt bleſt meeting? No! I mark'd him,
His parting glance was that of fervent love,
And conſtancy unalter'd. Do not fear him.

ELFRIDA.

I ſhould not fear him, were his preſent ſtay
The only cauſe. Alas, it is not ſo!
Why comes my Earl ſo ſecret to theſe arms?
Why, but becauſe he dreads the juſt reproach

Of ſome deluded fair one? Why am I
Here ſhrouded up, like the pale Votariſt,
Who knows no viſitant, ſave the lone owl,
That nightly leaves his ivy-ſhrouded cell,
And ſails on ſlow wing thro' the cloiſter'd iſles,
Liſt'ning her ſaintly oriſons? Why am I
Deny'd to follow my departed Lord
Whene'er his duty calls him to the palace?

CHORUS.

Covet not that; the nobleſt proof of love
That ATHELWOLD can give, is ſtill to guard
Your beauties from the blaſt of courtly gales,
The crimſon bluſh of virgin modeſty,
The delicate ſoft tints of innocence
There all fly off, and leave no boaſt behind
But well-rang'd, faded features. Ah, ELFRIDA,
Shou'd you be doom'd, which happier fate forbid!
To drag your hours through all that nauſeous ſcene
Of pageantry and vice; your purer breaſt,
True to its virtuous reliſh, ſoon would heave
A fervent ſigh for innocence and Harewood.

ELFRIDA.

You much miſtake me, Virgins; the throng'd palace
Were undeſir'd by me, did not that palace
Detain my ATHELWOLD. If he were here,
His preſence would convert this range of oaks
To ſtately columns; theſe gay-liv'ried flow'rs
To troops of gallant ladies; and yon deer,
That jut their antlers forth in ſportive fray,

To

To armed knights at jouſt or tournament.
If ATHELWOLD dwelt here; if no ambition
Could lure his ſteps from love, and this ſtill foreſt;
If I might never moan his time of abſence,
Longer than that which ſerv'd him for the chaſe
Or of the wolf, or ſtag; or when he bore
The hood-wink'd falcon forth; might theſe, my Virgins,
And theſe alone, be love's ſhort intervals,
I ſhould not have one thought remote from Harewood.

CHORUS.

And would you wiſh that ATHELWOLD ſhould ſlight
The weal of England, and on theſe light toys
Waſte his unvalued hours? No, fond ELFRIDA;
His active ſoul is wing'd for nobler flights.

ELFRIDA.

What then, muſt England's welfare hold my Earl
For ever from theſe ſhades?

CHORUS.

We ſay not that.
The youth, who bathes in pleaſure's tempting ſtream
At well-judg'd intervals, feels all his ſoul
Nerv'd with recruited ſtrength; but if too oft
He ſwims in ſportive mazes through the flood,
It chills his languid virtue. For this cauſe
Your Earl forbids, that theſe enchanting groves,
And their fair miſtreſs ſhould poſſeſs him wholly.

He

He knows he has a country and a king,
That claim his firſt attention; yet be ſure,
'Twill not be long, ere his unbending mind
Shall loſe in ſweet oblivion ev'ry care,
Among th' embow'ring ſhades that veil ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA.

Oh be that ſpeech prophetic; may he ſoon
Seek theſe embow'ring ſhades! Meanwhile, my friends,
Sooth me with harmony. I know full well
That ye were nurs'd in Cornwall's wizard caves,
And oft have pac'd the fairy-peopled vales
Of Devon, where Poſterity retains
Some vein of that old minſtrelſy, which breath'd
Through each time-honour'd grove of Britiſh oak,
There, where the ſpreading conſecrated boughs
Fed the ſage miſletoe, the holy Druids
Lay rapt in moral muſings; while the Bards
Call'd from their ſolemn harps ſuch lofty airs,
As drew down Fancy from the realms of Light
To paint ſome radiant viſion on their minds,
Of high myſterious import. But on me
Such ſtrains ſublime were waſted: I but aſk
A ſprightly ſong to ſpeed the lazy flight
Of theſe dull hours. And muſic ſure can find
A magic ſpell to make them ſkim their round,
Swift as the ſwallow circles. Try its power:
While I, from yonder hillock, watch his coming.

[*Exit Elfrida.*

CHORUS

CHORUS.

ODE.

The Turtle tells her plaintive tale,
Sequeſter'd in ſome ſhadowy vale;
The Lark in radiant ether floats,
And ſwells his wild extatic notes:
Meanwhile on yonder hawthorn ſpray
The Linnet wakes her temp'rate lay;
She haunts no ſolitary ſhade,
She flutters o'er no ſun-ſhine mead,
No love-lorn griefs depreſs her ſong,
No raptures lift it loudly high,
But ſoft ſhe trills, amid th' aerial throng,
Smooth ſimple ſtrains of ſob'reſt harmony.

Sweet Bird! like thine our lay ſhall flow,
Nor gaily briſk, nor ſadly ſlow;
For to thy note ſedate, and clear,
CONTENT ſtill lends a liſt'ning ear.
Reclin'd this moſſy bank along,
Oft has ſhe heard thy careleſs ſong:
Why hears not now? What fairer grove
From Harewood lures her devious love?
What fairer grove than Harewood knows,
More woodland walks, more fragrant gales,
More ſhadowy bowers, inviting ſoft repoſe,
More ſtreams ſlow-wand'ring thro'her winding vales?

Perhaps to ſome lone cave the Rover flies,
Where lull'd in pious peace the Hermit lies.

For,

For, from the Hall's tumultuous ſtate,
Where banners wave with blazon'd gold,
There will the meek-ey'd Matron oft retreat,
And with the ſolemn Sage high converſe hold.

There, Goddeſs, on the ſhaggy mound,
Where tumbling torrents roar around,
Where pendant mountains o'er your head
Stretch their reverential ſhade;
You liſten, while the holy Seer
Slowly chaunts his veſpers clear;
Or of his ſparing meſs partake,
The ſav'ry pulſe, the wheaten cake,
The bev'rage cool of limpid rill.
Then, riſing light, your hoſt you bleſs,
And o'er his ſaintly temples bland diſtil
Seraphic day-dreams of heav'n's happineſs.

Where'er thou art, enchanting Power,
Thou ſoon wilt ſmile in Harewood's bower:
Soon will thy fairy feet be ſeen,
Printing this dew-impearled green;
Soon ſhall we mark thy geſtures meek,
Thy glitt'ring eye, and dimpled cheek,
Among the welcome gueſts that move
Attendant on the ſtate of Love.
There, when the Sov'reign leads along
Of Sports and Smiles a jocund train,
Then laſt, but loveliеſt of the lovely throng,
Thou com'ſt to ſoften, yet ſecure his reign.

And, hark, compleating our prophetic lay,
The fleet hoof rattles o'er the flinty way;
Now nearer, and now nearer sounds.
Avaunt! ye vain, delusive Fears.
Hark! Echo tells through Harewood's amplest bounds,
That Love, Content, and ATHELWOLD appears.

ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Look ever thus; with that bright glance of joy
Thus always meet my transports. Let these arms
Thus ever fold me; and this cheek, that blooms
With all health's opening roses, press my lips,
Warm as at this blest moment.

ELFRIDA.

ATHELWOLD,
I had prepar'd me many a stern rebuke;
Had arm'd my brow with frowns, and taught my eye
Th' averted glance of coldness, which might best
Greet such a loit'ring lover: but I find
'Twas a vain task; for this my truant heart
Forgets each lesson, which resentment taught,
And in thy sight knows only to be happy.

ATHELWOLD.

My best ELFRIDA—Heav'ns! it cannot last.
The giddy height of joy, to which I'm lifted,
Is as a hanging rock, at whose low foot

The

The black and beating ſurge of Infamy
Rolls ready to receive, and ſink my ſoul.

ELFRIDA.

So ſoon to fall into this muſing mood—
I thought, my Lord, you promis'd you would leave
Theſe looks behind at Court. Nay, 'twas the cauſe
Aſſign'd for this my reſidence at Harewood,
That you might never come to theſe fond arms,
But with a breaſt devoid of public care,
And fill'd alone with rapture and ELFRIDA.
Said you not ſo? Why then that penſive poſture,
That down-caſt eye? Surely the City's din,
And this calm grove have loſt their difference.
I'll with you to the palace.

ATHELWOLD.

Heav'n forbid!

ELFRIDA.

Nay, my beſt Lord, I meant it but in ſport;
For ſhould you bid me quit theſe blooming lawns
For ſome bare heath, or drear unpeopled deſert;
Believe me, I would think its wildneſs Eden,
If ATHELWOLD with frequent viſitation
Endear'd the ſavage ſcene: but yet I fear
My Father.

ATHELWOLD.

Hah! why him?

ELFRIDA.

You know his temper;
How jealous of his rank, and his trac'd lineage
From royal anceſtry. I fear me much,
He will not brook you ſhould conceal me long
In this lone privacy: No, he will deem it
Far unbecoming her, whoſe veins are fill'd
With the rich ſtream of his nobility.
Should it be ſo, his hot and fiery nature,
I doubt, will blaze, and do ſome dreadful outrage.

ATHELWOLD.

He need not know it, or, if chance he ſhould,
It matters not, if ſo this foreſt life
Seem of your own adoption and free choice.
And that it will ſo ſeem, I truſt that love,
Which ever yet has met my wayward will
With pleas'd compliance, and unaſk'd aſſent.

ELFRIDA.

And ever ſhall; yet blame me not, my Lord,
If prying womanhood ſhould prompt a wiſh
To learn the cauſe of this your ſtrange commotion,
Which ever wakes, if I but drop one thought
Of quitting Harewood.

ATHELWOLD.

Go to the clear ſurface
Of yon unruffled lake, and bending o'er it,
There read my anſwer.

ELFRIDA.

Theſe are riddles, Sir—

ATHEL-

ATHELWOLD.

No; for its glaſſy and reflecting ſurface
Will ſmile with charms too tempting for a palace,

ELFRIDA.

Does ATHELWOLD diſtruſt ELFRIDA's faith?

ATHELWOLD.

No; but he much diſtruſts ELFRIDA's beauty,

ELFRIDA.

Away: you trifle.

ATHELWOLD.

Never more in earneſt;
I would not for the throne which EDGAR ſits on,
That EDGAR ſhould behold it.

ELFRIDA.

What, my Lord,
Think you the face, that caught your ſingle heart,
Will make all hearts its captives? Vain ſurmize.
Yet grant it could; the face is your's alone:
Not EDGAR's ſelf would dare to ſeize it from you.
EDGAR's a King, and not a tyrant.

ATHELWOLD.

True,
EDGAR's a King, a juſt one; his firm feet
Walk ever in the fore-right road of honour:
Nor do I know what lure can draw his ſteps
Devious from that ſtraight path, ſave only one:

That

That tempting lure is beauty. Ah! ELFRIDA,
Throw but the dazzling bait within his view,
The untam'd wolf does not with fiercer rage
Burſt the ſlight bondage of the ſilken net,
Than he the ties of law. Late, very late,
Smit caſually with young MATILDA's face,
He ſtrait commanded her reluctant Mother
To yield her to his arms: nor had ſhe 'ſcap'd
The violating fervour of his love,
Had not the prudent dame ſuborn'd her handmaid
To take the unchaſte office, and be led,
Veil'd in the maſk of night, to EDGAR's chamber
A counterfeit MATILDA. As it chanc'd,
The damſel pleas'd the King, nor did detection
A whit abate his fondneſs; he forgave
The prudent mother, eas'd MATILDA's fears,
And led the wanton minſtrel to his court,
Where ſtill ſhe ſhares—

CHORUS.

Behold, Earl ATHELWOLD,
A meſſenger arrives; his ſpeed and aſpect
Speak ſome important errand.

EDWIN, ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

How now, Edwin?

EDWIN.

The King, my Lord, is on his way to Harewood.

ATHEL-

ATHELWOLD.

The King!

EDWIN.

His purpoſe is to paſs through Mercia:
And in a haſty meſſage, ſome two hours
After you left the palace, this his pleaſure
Was ſent you by Lord SEOFRID; withal
Commanding your attendance. You being abſent,
He ſtraitway turn'd his courſe thro' this fair foreſt,
Meaning to chace the Stag; his train is ſmall,
As was his purpoſe ſudden.

ELFRIDA.

Good, my Lord,
Why thus perplex'd?

CHORUS.

Heav'ns! what a deep Deſpair
Sits on his brow!

ELFRIDA.

The notice ſure is ſhort;
But that's a trifle, a ſmall train requires
The ſmaller preparation: let him come.

ATHELWOLD.

Yes, let him come: ſo thou wilt ſay, ELFRIDA,
When thou haſt heard my tale. Yes, let him come,
So wilt thou ſay, and let thy huſband periſh.
Yet ſhall theſe arms once more embrace thee cloſely,
Ere yet thou fly them as the pois'nous adder.

'Tis

'Tis o'er: in that embrace ELFRIDA's Love
Was buried; and in that embrace, the Peace
Of wretched ATHELWOLD.

ELFRIDA.

What may this be!

ATHELWOLD.

Oh EDWIN, EDWIN! when ſurviving Malice
Shall prey upon the fame of thy dead Maſter,
Wilt thou not ſome way ſtrive to check the Fiend's
Inſatiate Fury? Wilt thou ſee my name
Defil'd, and blacken'd with Detraction's venom,
And bear it patiently!

ELFRIDA.

What means my beſt—

ATHELWOLD.

Peace; not a word of Beſt, or Lov'd, or Dear:
Theſe are not titles now for thee to uſe,
Or me to triumph in. Virgins, retire:
We would a while be private. Nay, return.
Concealment would be vain; and ye and EDWIN
Are bound to me. ALBINA! as for you,
I ſav'd your father when his blood was forfeit.

CHORUS.

Not I, great Earl, alone, but all this train
Are bound by ev'ry tie of faith and love
To gen'rous ATHELWOLD; to that mild Maſter,
Who never forc'd our Service to one act,

But

But of ſuch liberal ſort, as Freedom's ſelf
Would ſmilingly perform.

ATHELWOLD.

It may be ſo,
But where's the tie, ELFRIDA, that may bind
Thy faith and love?

ELFRIDA.

The ſtrongeſt ſure, my Lord,
The golden, nuptial tie. Try but its ſtrength.

ATHELWOLD.

I muſt perforce this inſtant. Know, ELFRIDA,
Once, on a day of high feſtivity,
The youthful King, encircled with his Nobles,
Crown'd high the ſparkling bowl; and much of Love,
Of Beauty much the ſprightly converſe ran;
When, as it well might chance, the briſk Lord ARDULPH
Made gallant note of ORGAR's peerleſs daughter,
And in ſuch phraſe as might enflame a breaſt
More cool than EDGAR's. Early on the morrow
Th' impatient Monarch gave me ſwift commiſſion
To view thoſe charms, of which Lord ARDULPH's tongue
Had given ſuch warm deſcription: to whoſe words
If my impartial eye gave full aſſent,
I had his royal mandate on the inſtant
To hail you Queen of England.

ELFRIDA.

'Stead of which
You came, and hail'd me Wife of ATHELWOLD.
Was this the tale I was ſo taught to fear?
Was this the deed, that known would make me fly
Thy claſping arm, as 'twere the pois'nous adder?
No, let this tender, fond embrace aſſure thee,
That thy ELFRIDA's love can never die;
Or, if it could, this animating touch
Would ſoon rewake it into life and rapture.

ATHELWOLD.

Doſt thou then pardon me? Come, injur'd ſov'reign,
Plunge deep thy ſword of juſtice in this breaſt,
And I will die contented.

ELFRIDA.

Heav'n forbid!
What can be done?

CHORUS.

Indeed, ye conſtant pair,
'Tis fit ye ſtrive to fly the coming danger.
For Safety now ſits wav'ring on your Love,
Like the light down upon the Thiſtle's beard,
Which ev'ry breeze may part. Say, noble Earl,
What feint was us'd to lull the king's impatience?

ATHELWOLD.

Soon as theſe ſhades had veil'd my beauteous bride,
I haſted back to EDGAR, laugh'd at ARDULPH,

And

And talk'd of ELFRID, as of vulgar beauties;
Own'd no uncommon light'ning in her eye,
No breaſt that ſham'd the ſnow, or cheek the roſe.
The ſprightly King believ'd me, and forgot her.

CHORUS.

But an alliance, great as ATHELWOLD'S
With ORGAR'S daughter, ſoon would blaze abroad,
The theme of popular converſe.

ATHELWOLD.

True, it would;
And for that reaſon, when I laſt was here,
The King was taught I went to wed ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA.

How ſo, my Lord?

ATHELWOLD.

Thy Father, my ELFRIDA,
Has rich poſſeſſions: Theſe, and theſe alone,
I made my theme of Love; and told the king,
That tho' thy face (pardon the impious falſhood)
Boaſted not charms to grace a Monarch's throne,
Yet would thy dow'r well ſuit his miniſter.
I therefore meant to aſk thee of thy father,
And (that my want of ſkill in choice might 'ſcape
All cenſure) hide thee cloſe in Harewood caſtle.
EDGAR with ſmiles conſented, and, I think,
Harbours no thought of my diſloyalty.

ELFRIDA.

If ſo, what danger now?

ATHELWOLD.

Aſk'ſt thou, what danger?
'Sdeath, will that glance not inſtantly proclaim
My tenfold treachery?

ELFRIDA.

He ſhall not ſee me.
I'll hide me inſtant in ſome ſecret chamber,
And robe this virgin in my bridal veſtments.

ATHELWOLD.

Thy Love, like balm, runs trick'ling o'er the wounds
Of my torn boſom; yet 'tis vain, 'tis vain:
Thou muſt thyſelf appear, for ARDULPH ever
Attends the king, and would detect the fraud.

ELFRIDA.

If ſo, yet ſtill I can inſure our ſafety;
For as you fear my ſoftneſs of complexion,
I'll ſtain it with the juice of duſky leaves,
Or yellow berries, which this various wood
From tree or ſhrub will yield me. Theſe I'll uſe,
And form a thouſand methods to conceal
The little gleams of grace, which Nature lent me.
Fear not my caution.

ATHELWOLD.

Gentleſt, beſt of Creatures,
Go, do then as thy tender care directs,
And yet how vain? What wond'rous art can ſteal
The liquid lightnings from thoſe radiant eyes,
Or rob the wavy ringlets of that hair

Of all their nameleſs graces? Say it could,
Yet would that modeſt, but majeſtic mien,
That inborn dignity of ſoul, which breathes
Thro' each angelic geſture, ſtill remain
To ſeize the heart of EDGAR. Reſt, ELFRIDA,
Reſt as thou art, in all that blaze of beauty!
I muſt ſubmit to my juſt lot, and loſe thee.

ELFRIDA.

Away, my Lord, with theſe too anxious ſcruples!
Fear not my carriage; I will ſtoop my head,
Drawl out an idiot phraſe, and do each act
With ev'n a rude and peaſant awkwardneſs.

EDWIN.

Ere this, my Lord, I think the King has reach'd
The full mid-way; 'twere fit you ſtood prepar'd
To give him meeting.

ATHELWOLD.

Give him meeting, Edwin!
Alas! I have no maſk to veil my baſeneſs,
When deep contrition ſhadows all my ſoul.
I cannot dreſs my features in light ſmiles,
And look the thing I am not. No, theſe eyes
Are not as yet true vaſſals to my purpoſe,
As yet indeed I am but half a villain.

ELFRIDA.

You weigh this matter in too nice a balance,
Your crime, my Lord, is but the crime of love:
Thouſands like you have fail'd.

ATHEL-

ATHELWOLD.

I know, ELFRIDA,
Could love abſolve the crime, my ſoul were pure
As maiden innocence. Yes, I do love thee,
And thou art fair—beyond—But that's my bane;
Thy ev'ry charm adds weight to my offence,
And heaps freſh wrongs upon the beſt of Maſters.
Yes, ELFRID, EDGAR was the beſt of Maſters.
Oh hide me from the thought in that dear boſom—
Heav'ns! I muſt die or keep her.

ELFRIDA.

Live, or die,
I'm thine alike. Death cannot aught abate,
Or life augment, my love. Let this embrace
Be witneſs of my truth.

ATHELWOLD.

It ſhall, it ſhall:
Thy ev'ry word and look declares thee faithful.
Secure of all thy love, and all thy prudence,
Returning confidence has arm'd my ſoul
For this dread meeting; reſting on thy truth
I go— [*Exit Athelwold.*

ELFRIDA.

Go, and thy guardian ſaint preſerve thee,
Show'r bleſſings vaſt as would my laviſh love,
Had I his power to bleſs thee!

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Yes, my Siſters,
The ſilent awe that reigns thro' all your train,
Befits ye well. Let Admiration firſt
Pay her mute tribute. She can beſt expreſs,
By thoſe her kindling cheeks, and lifted eyes,
Where the tear twinkles, that tranſcendant praiſe
ELFRIDA's Virtue claims.

ELFRIDA.

My Virtue, Virgins,
Is only Love. Or, ſay that it be virtue,
It owes its ſource to Love, to chaſteſt Love,
Than which what paſſion more impels the mind
To fair and gen'rous action? But the hours
Are precious now. I'll to yon neighb'ring grove:
There grows an azure flow'r, I oft have mark'd it,
Which ſtains the preſſing finger with a juice
Of duſky, yellow tinct: Its name I know not.
I'll fetch and try it ſtrait. Wait my return.
[*Exit Elfrida.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

Whence does this ſudden Luſtre riſe,
That gilds the grove? Not like the noontide beam,
Which ſparkling dances on the trembling ſtream,
Nor the blue lightning's flaſh ſwift-ſhooting thro' the ſkies.

But

But ſuch a ſolemn ſteady Light,
As o'er the cloudleſs azure ſteals,
When Cynthia, riding on the brow of night,
Stops in their mid career her ſilver wheels.

Whence can it riſe, but from the ſober power
Of CONSTANCY? She, heav'n-born Queen,
Deſcends, and here in HAREWOOD's hallow'd bower,
Fixes her ſtedfaſt reign:
Stedfaſt, as when her high command
Gives to the ſtarry band
Their radiant Stations in heav'n's ample plain.
Stedfaſt, as when around this nether ſphere,
She winds the various year.
Tells what time the Snow-drop cold
Its maiden whiteneſs may unfold,
When the golden harveſt bend,
When the ruddy fruits deſcend.
Then bids pale Winter wake, to pour
The pearly hail's tranſlucent ſhow'r,
To caſt his ſilv'ry mantle o'er the woods,
And bind in cryſtal chains the ſlumb'ring floods.

The Soul, which ſhe inſpires, has pow'r to climb
To all the heights ſublime
Of Virtue's tow'ring hill.
That hill, at whoſe low foot weak-warbling ſtrays
The ſcanty ſtream of human praiſe,
A ſhallow trickling rill.

While

While on the Summits hov'ring Angels ſhed,
From their bleſt pinions, the nectareous dews
Of rich immortal Fame: From theſe the Muſe
Oft ſteals ſome precious drops, and ſkilful blends
With thoſe the lower fountain lends;
Then ſhow'rs it all on ſome high-favour'd head.
But thou, ELFRIDA, claim'ſt the genuine dew;
Thy worth demands it all,
Pure, and unmixt, on thee the holy drops ſhall fall.

[*Elfrida returns with flowers.*

ELFRIDA, ORGAR, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA. [*looking on the flower.*

'Tis ſtrange, my Virgins, this ſweet child of Summer,
Silken and ſoft, whoſe breath perfumes the air,
Whoſe gay veſt paints the Morn, ſhould in its boſom
Hide ſuch pollution? Yet 'tis often thus:
All are not as they ſeem.

ORGAR.

Yet hear me, Lady.

ELFRIDA.

Be gone, unmanner'd Stranger, nor purſue me:
Hence, from the Grove. Know ye this Pilgrim, Virgins?
On my return I met him here.

CHORUS.

Alas;
We ſaw him here before, and heard his tale,

That mov'd our pity—But I fear me now
'Twas falſe; ſome ſpy perchance, and may have heard—

ORGAR.

I have; yet not for that are you betray'd.
Fair Excellence, my heart is bound unto you,
I feel a tender intereſt in your welfare,
Tender as Fathers feel.

ELFRIDA.

As Fathers feel;
That well-known voice, and ah! that look—

ORGAR.

ELFRIDA!

ELFRIDA.

Yes it is him, it is my Father, Virgins.
Support me, or I faint! O wherefore, Sir?—

ORGAR.

Take courage, Daughter; my parental fondneſs
Prompted this viſit. Thus I came diſguis'd,
To learn the cauſe of my dear child's confinement:
And I have learnt it.

ELFRIDA.

Then all's loſt for ever.

ORGAR.

Thou know'ſt, ELFRIDA, next my houſe's honour,
Thy peace has ever been my deareſt care.
But ſuch an inſult—No: I cannot brook it.

So

So black a fraud! By all my anceſtors,
By BELIN's ſhade I will have ample vengeance.

ELFRIDA.

Alas, I know too well your dreadful purpoſe.
I knew it at the firſt. Yes, he muſt fall.
Yet pardon me, if my poor trembling heart
Puts up I know not what of pray'rs and vows
To ev'ry pitying ſaint. Celeſtial Guardians
Of nuptial Conſtancy! Oh bend from heav'n
Your ſtar-crown'd heads, and hear a wretched woman,
That begs ye ſave, from a dread father's rage,
Her Lord, her huſband.

ORGAR.

Huſband! 'Sdeath what huſband?
Is ATHELWOLD thy huſband? Sooner call
Th' impeached thief true maſter of the booty
He ſtole, or murder'd for. Diſdain the Villain,
And help me to revenge thee.

CHORUS.

Think, great Earl;
What ſanctimonious ties reſtrain your daughter.
Did ſhe not ſwear before the hallow'd ſhrine
Eternal fealty to this her Lord?
Yet ſay, that he deceiv'd her; ſhall her truth
Dare to revenge? No, Sir, in higheſt heav'n
Vengeance 'mid ſtorms and tempeſts ſits enſhrin'd,
Veſted in robes of lightning, and there ſleeps,
Unwak'd but by th' incens'd Almighty's call.
Oh! let not Man preſume to take unbid
That dread vicegerency.

ORGAR.

Peace, Virgins, peace.
Not ev'n the ſaws of Druids or of Bards
Have weight with me, when inſults high as this
Rouſe my juſt indignation. Hear me, Daughter,
You went to ſearch for flow'rs, to blot your charms
With their dun hue. Yes, thou ſhalt ſearch for flow'rs,
Yet ſhall they be the loveliеſt of the ſpring;
Flow'rs, that entangling in thine auburn hair,
Or bluſhing 'mid the whiteneſs of thy boſom,
May to the pow'r of ev'ry native grace,
Give double life and luſtre. Haſte, my child,
Array thyſelf in thy moſt gorgeous garb,
And ſee each jewel, which my Love procur'd thee,
Dart its full radiance. More than all, put on
The nobler ornament of winning ſmiles,
And kind inviting glances.

ELFRIDA.

Never, never;
When this true heart renounces ATHELWOLD,
May equitable heav'n—

ORGAR.

Away with vows;
And with a duteous, and attentive Ear,
Liſten to my perſuaſions. Much I wiſh
Perſuaſions might prevail, that not compell'd
To uſe a father's juſt prerogative,

My

My will may meet with thy unforc'd obedience.
Follow me, on thy duty.

ELFRIDA.

Cruel Father,
That duty ſhall obey you; I will follow;
Yet dread as is that frown, dreadful as death,
It ſhall not ſhake the tenor of my faith;
Living or dead I ſtill am ATHELWOLD'S.

[*Exeunt Orgar and Elfrida.*

SEMICHORUS.

Horror! Horror!
The Pen of Fate, dipt in its deepeſt gall,
Perhaps on that ill-omen'd wall,
Now writes th' event of this tremendous day.
Oh! that our weaker ſight
Could read the myſtic characters, and ſpy
What to the unpurg'd, mortal Eye,
Is hid in endleſs Night.

SEMICHORUS.

Suſpenſe! thou frozen gueſt, be gone.
The wretch, whoſe rugged bed
Is ſpread on thorns, more ſoftly reſts his head,
Than he that ſinks amid the cygnet's down,
If thou, tormenting fiend, be nigh,
To prompt his ſtarting tear, his ceaſeleſs ſigh,
His wiſh, his pray'r, his vow for ling'ring certainty.

CHORUS.

But hark! that certainty arrives. Methought
I heard the winding horn. I did not err;

The

The King is near at hand. This quick approach
Will ſure prevent this proud Earl's cruel purpoſe.
Yet what of that! Does her fair form require
The blazon of rich veſture? Genuine beauty
Nor aſks, nor needs it: Negligence alone
Is its bright diadem, and artleſs eaſe
Its robe of Tyrian tincture. Say, my Siſters,
Shall we ſalute this monarch with a hymn
Of Feſtival and Joy! Alas, ſuch joy
Ill ſuits our trembling hearts, and weeping eyes.
And now 'twere vain; for ſee, the King approaches.

EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, CHORUS.

EDGAR.

No, ATHELWOLD; not from a partial blindneſs,
Or for the mode and guiſe of Courteſy,
Are we thus large in praiſe; in our true judgment,
This Caſtle is not more kind Nature's debtor
For its delicious ſite, than 'tis to thee
For this ſo goodly ſtructure. From its baſe,
Ev'n to yon turrets trim, and taper ſpires,
All is of choiceſt Maſonry. Each part
Doth boaſt a ſeparate grace; but Ornament,
Tho' here the richeſt that the eye can note,
Is us'd, not laviſh'd; Art ſeems generous here,
Yet not a prodigal. But ah! my Earl, [*ſeeing the Chorus.*
What living charms are here? Thy caſtle's beauty
Muſt not detain me from this loveliet proſpect.
Your pardon, fair Ones, that my wayward Eye
Paid not at firſt, where firſt was ſurely due,
Its homage to your Graces.

ATHEL-

ATHELWOLD.

Heav'ns! they weep.
What may this mean? Some dread and unſeen chance
Has counter-work'd my ſafety.

EDGAR.

Whence this ſilence;
Why are your lovely heads thus bow'd with ſadneſs?
Beſhrew my heart, my Lord, but this is ſtrange.
I know thee, Earl, and know thy gentleneſs,
More prone t'obey, than lord it o'er the ſex;
Elſe ſhould I gueſs this ſorrow had its riſe
From ſome diſcourteous treatment.

CHORUS.

No, dread Sov'reign;
He is the nobleſt, gentleſt, beſt of maſters;
And may your Love reward——

ORGAR, ATHELWOLD, EDGAR, CHORUS,

ATHELWOLD.

Death to my hopes!

ORGAR.

Yes, Villain, ſtart; but let this vengeful arm
Arreſt thy baſeneſs; would to heav'n its ſtrength,
Thus graſping thee, could open thy falſe breaſt,
And bare thy heart to the ſham'd eye of Day.

EDGAR.

Patience, hot Man. What art thou?

ORGAR.

ORGAR.

Earl of Devon!
Pardon me, Prince; that this my honeſt rage
O'erleaps obedient duty. I am wrong'd,
Yet that's but ſmall; for know, much injur'd Prince,
Thy wrongs as well as mine both call for juſtice.
Yes, Sir, I here, on a true ſubject's oath,
Proclaim Earl ATHELWOLD a faithleſs traitor.

EDGAR.

Ha! What is this? Renounce the word, old Earl;
Thy length of years hath forc'd thee, ſure, to preſs
The verge of dotage. ATHELWOLD! what ATHELWOLD
A faithleſs traitor! Periſh the ſuſpicion.
Never before did word, or thought, or look,
Give doubt of his diſtinguiſh'd loyalty.
Dotage alone could frame the acculation.

ORGAR.

I do not dote, thanks Heav'n, my faculties
Are yet my own, unblemiſh'd and unhurt,
Would ſo my Daughter were!

EDGAR.

What is his drift?

ATHELWOLD.

Better, my royal Lord, you mark'd him not;
The wayward Earl is—

ORGAR.

ORGAR.

What, audacious Villain!
I will be heard.

EDGAR.

Go to, thou choleric Lord.

ORGAR.

When thou haſt heard me, EDGAR, call me choleric.

EDGAR.

Speak then, and briefly.

ORGAR.

Once, my ſacred Liege,
I had a daughter, duteous as e'er crown'd
A Father's wiſh, and lovely as could warm
A youth to am'rous tranſports. This, my Lord,
You learnt long ſince from noble ARDULPH's praiſes,
And fir'd with his deſcription, ſent this Earl,
This faithful Earl, t' invite her to our throne.

EDGAR.

No, ORGAR, not t' invite her to our throne,
Simply to note her beauty was his errand.

ORGAR.

Yes, he did note it, ſtampt it for his own.
But why this parley? Enter, Sir, theſe gates,
And let ELFRIDA's features be the book,
Where you may read the ſtory of his falſhood,
Ev'n on the inſtant.

EDGAR.

Noble Lord, lead on,
We'll follow to the trial. I will humour
The Earl's hot temper. He has heard, my friend,
We meant t'exalt his daughter, and for that
His partial fondneſs, link'd with his ambition,
Levels this rage at thee. Attend us, Lords,

[*Exeunt Edgar, Orgar, &c.*

CHORUS, ATHELWOLD.

CHORUS.

My Lord, the King is enter'd: ſtand not thus
In mute and fixt diſtreſs.

ATHELWOLD.

Away, away;
What! can a Man that thinks ſuch thoughts as I do
Have pow'r of word or motion? ſpeak to me;
Inform me all. What ſaid ſhe, when I left her?
How came her Father hither? how did ſhe
Greet his arrival? Say, was ſhe compell'd,
Or did her free, and voluntary voice,
Tell all the ſtory? Did ſhe marſhal him,
To this his deed of vengeance?

CHORUS.

Deareſt Maſter;
ELFRIDA told him not: his own deceit
Was his informer. Here the Earl arriv'd
Early at morn, in mean and pilgrim weeds,
All like an ancient, toil-worn traveller;

And

And with a tale told in ſuch piteous ſtrain,
Fraught with ſuch ſad and moving circumſtance,
With woes ſo well diſſembled; that our ſoftneſs
Suffered him enter this cloſe bow'r for reſt,
Which he adapting to his prying purpoſe,
Thence learnt the ſecret. This our diſobedience,
We own—

ATHELWOLD.

Was my perdition. Yet 'tis well;
I blame ye not; it was Heav'n's juſtice, Virgins;
This brought him hither; this annull'd your faith.
I do not think, you purpos'd my deſtruction;
But yet you have deſtroy'd me. O ELFRIDA,
And art thou faithful? This my jealous eye
Thought it had mark'd ſome ſpeck of change upon thee;
Thought it had found, what might have made thy loſs
Somewhat within endurance. 'Tis not ſo;
And this thy purity but ſerves t'augment
The ſum of my diſtractions. Meet me, EDGAR,
With thy rais'd ſword: be merciful and ſudden—

[*Exit Athelwold.*

CHORUS.

ODE.

Say, will no white-rob'd Son of Light,
Swift-darting from his heav'nly height,

Here deign to take his hallow'd ſtand;
Here wave his amber locks; unfold
His pinions cloth'd with downy gold;
Here ſmiling ſtretch his tutelary wand?
And you, ye hoſt of Saints, for ye have known
Each dreary path in Life's perplexing maze,
Tho' now ye circle yon eternal throne
With harpings high of inexpreſſive praiſe,
Will not your train deſcend in radiant ſtate,
To break with Mercy's beam this gath'ring cloud of fate?

'Tis ſilence all. No Son of Light
Darts ſwiftly from his heav'nly height;
No train of radiant Saints deſcend.
"Mortals, in vain ye hope to find,
"If guilt, if fraud has ſtain'd your mind,
"Or Saint to hear, or Angel to defend."

So TRUTH proclaims. I hear the ſacred ſound
Burſt from the center of her burning throne:
Where aye ſhe ſits with ſtar-wreath'd luſtre crown'd:
A bright Sun claſps her adamantine zone.
So TRUTH proclaims: her awful voice I hear:
With many a ſolemn pauſe it ſlowly meets my ear.

"Attend, ye Sons of Men; attend, and ſay,"
Does not enough of my refulgent ray
Break thro' the veil of your mortality!
Say, does not reaſon in this form deſcry
Unnum-

Unnumber'd, nameleſs glories, that ſurpaſs
The Angel's floating pomp, the Seraph's glowing grace?

Shall then your earth-born daughters vie
With me? Shall ſhe, whoſe brighteſt eye
But emulates the diamond's blaze,
Whoſe cheek but mocks the peaches' bloom,
Whoſe breath the hyacinth's perfume,
Whoſe melting voice the warbling woodlark's lays,
Shall ſhe be deem'd my rival? Shall a form
Of elemental droſs, of mould'ring clay,
Vie with theſe charms imperial? The poor worm
Shall prove her conteſt vain. Life's little day
Shall paſs, and ſhe is gone: while I appear
Fluſh'd with the bloom of youth thro' Heav'n's eternal year.

Know, Mortals, know, ere firſt ye ſprung,
Ere firſt theſe orbs in ether hung,
I ſhone amid the heav'nly throng.
Theſe eyes beheld Creation's day,
This voice began the choral lay,
And taught Archangels their triumphant ſong.
Pleas'd I ſurvey'd bright Nature's gradual birth,
Saw infant Light with kindling luſtre ſpread,
Soft vernal fragrance clothe the flow'ring earth,
And Ocean heave on his extended bed;
Saw the tall pine aſpiring pierce the ſky,
The tawny Lion ſtalk, the rapid Eagle fly.

Laſt,

Laſt, Man aroſe, erect in youthful grace;
Heav'n's hallow'd image ſtampt upon his face;
And, as he roſe, the high beheſt was giv'n,
"That I alone of all the hoſt of heav'n,
"Should reign Protectreſs of the godlike Youth."
Thus the Almighty ſpake: he ſpake and call'd me
TRUTH.

ATHELWOLD, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Baniſh me! No. I'll die. For why ſhould Life
Remain a lonely lodger in that breaſt
Which Honour leaves deſerted? Idle breath!
Thou can'ſt not fill ſuch vacancy. Be gone.
This ſword ſhall free——

CHORUS.

Oh ſhame to Fortitude!
Shame to that manly paſſion, which inſpires
Its vigorous warmth, when the bleak blaſts of Fate
Would chill the ſoul. Oh call the ready virtue
Quick to thy aid, for ſhe is ever near thee;
Is ever prompt to ſpread her ſevenfold ſhield
O'er noble breaſts.

ATHELWOLD.

And but o'er noble breaſts;
Not o'er the breaſt which livid Infamy
Indelibly has ſpotted. Oh ſhame, ſhame,
Sword, rid me of the thought.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Forbear, forbear;
Think what a ſea of deep perdition whelms
The wretch's trembling ſoul, who launches forth
Unlicens'd to Eternity. Think, think;
And let the thought reſtrain thy impious hand.
The race of Man is one vaſt marſhall'd army,
Summon'd to paſs the ſpacious realms of Time,
Their leader the Almighty. In that march
Ah who may quit his poſt? when high in Air
The chos'n Archangel rides, whoſe right hand wields
Th' imperial ſtandard of heav'n's providence,
Which, dreadly ſweeping thro' the vaulted ſky,
O'erſhadows all creation.

ATHELWOLD.

I was once——
Yes, I was once (I have his royal word for't)
A man of ſuch try'd faith, ſuch ſteady honour,
As mock'd all doubt and ſcruple.—What a change!
Now muſt that unſtain'd, virgin character,
Be doom'd to groſs and hourly proſtitution,
Sating the luſt of ſlander; and my wife,
My chaſte ELFRIDA! O diſtraction, no,
I'll fly to ſave her.

EDWIN.

Stay, my deareſt Maſter;
You ruſh on inſtant death.

ATHEL-

ATHELWOLD.

I mean it, ſlave,
And would'ſt thou hinder me?

EDWIN.

Yes, Sir, I hold
'Tis duty to my king, and love to you,
Thus to oppoſe your entrance.

ATHELWOLD.

What, thou traitor!
Thy pardon, EDWIN, I forgot myſelf;
Forgot, that I ſtood here a baniſh'd Man;
And that this gate was ſhut againſt its Maſter.
And yet this gate leads to my dear ELFRIDA;
Can it be barr'd to me? Oh Earth, cold Earth,
Upon whoſe breaſt I caſt this load of mis'ry,
Bear it awhile; and you, ye aged Oaks,
Ye venerable Fathers of this wood,
Who oft have cool'd beneath your arching ſhades
My humble anceſtors, oft ſeen them hie
To your ſpread umbrage, from yon ſultry field,
Their ſcene of honeſt labour, ſhade, ah! ſhade,
The laſt, the wretcheſt of all their race.
I will not long pollute ye; for I mean
To pay beneath your conſecrated gloom
A ſacrifice to honour, and the ghoſts
Of thoſe progenitors, who ſternly frown
On me their baſe deſcendant.

EDWIN

EDWIN.

See, ye Virgins,
How Horror ſhades his brow; how fixt his eye;
Heav'ns! what deſpair—

CHORUS.

EDWIN, 'tis ever thus
With noble minds, if chance they ſlide to folly;
Remorſe ſtings deeper, and relentleſs Conſcience
Pours more of gall into the bitter cup
Of their ſevere repentance.

ATHELWOLD.

'Tis reſolv'd:
I'll enter and demand a ſecond audience.
And yet how vain! Ere I can reach his ear,
His ready train will ſtop me, and, with all
The cruel punctuality of office,
So prompt to act 'gainſt fallen favourites,
Diſmiſs me with reproof.——Surely I heard her.
Was't not ELFRIDA's voice? 'Tis ſhe herſelf.

ELFRIDA, EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, ORGAR, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

No, I will once more claſp him to my boſom.
I will not be withheld. I will o'ertake him,
Will go with him to exile. Hah, my Huſband!
So quickly found? They thought to tear me from thee;
But we will part no more.

EDGAR.

Take heed, ELFRIDA,
This ill-tim'd fondneſs may recall the fate
I juſt now freed him from; who loves like me
Can ill brook this. Or quit him, or he dies.

ATHELWOLD.

Yes, let me die! Death is my deareſt wiſh.
Quit me, ELFRIDA! leave me to my fate.
'Tis juſt, 'tis juſt. Thus to my ſov'reign's ſword
Freely I bare my breaſt. Strike, injur'd Prince;
But do not baniſh me.

ELFRIDA.

What, ATHELWOLD,
Is then the life, on whoſe dear preſervation
ELFRIDA's peace depends, not worth the ſaving?
Die then. But ere thy murd'rer ſtrikes the ſtroke,
Let me inform him, that his act deſtroys
No ſingle life.

EDGAR.

By heav'n, ſhe loves the traitor
Beyond all hope of change——

ELFRIDA.

No, ATHELWOLD,
Thou ſhalt not die. That pauſe in royal EDGAR
Beſpeaks forgiveneſs. He will ſoon relent;
And mercy, flowing from his gracious tongue,
Seal thy full pardon. Let us kneel, my Lord;
Seize the important moment; kneel together;

And,

And, as theſe ſtreaming eyes and lifted hands
Employ each act of ſilent ſupplication,
Do thou recount—Ah! no, thy modeſt tongue
Could never tell ev'n half the gallant ſtory.
Be ſilent then. Let EDGAR's ſelf reflect;
For well I know his Mem'ry writes thy Virtues
Upon its faireſt page. Yes, let him weigh
All thy paſt deeds of loyalty and faith,
'Gainſt this ſo light a fault.

EDGAR.

So light a fault!
Had he diſlodg'd my richeſt coffer'd treaſures,
Diſpers'd ſedition's poiſon 'mid my troops,
Or aim'd with daring and rebellious hand
To ſnatch theſe regal honours from my brow,
I ſooner could have pardon'd.

ATHELWOLD.

Ceaſe, ELFRIDA.
My doom is juſt—Yes, royal Sir, I go
To baniſhment. I do deſerve to breathe,
Deſerve to bear this load of life about me,
For many years; to lengthen out my age,
Liſt'ning the hourly knell of curſt remembrance,
Whoſe leaden ſtroke ſhall tell to my ſad ſoul
That I was faithful once.

ELFRIDA.

Oh flinty EDGAR,
What! will this penitence not move thee? Know
There is a roſe-lip'd Seraph ſits on high,

Who ever bends his holy ear to earth
To mark the voice of Penitence, to catch
Her ſolemn ſighs, to tune them to his harp,
And echo them in harmonies divine
Up to the throne of Grace. Ev'n Heav'n is won
By Penitence, and ſhall Heav'n's ſubſtitute,
Shall EDGAR ſcorn—

EDGAR.

Ceaſe, ceaſe, thou beauteous pleader!
Ah far too beauteous! Would'ſt thou gain thy ſuit,
Why glows that vermil lip? why rolls that eye
Bright as the ray of Morn? Why in each geſture
Such inexpreſſive graces, but becauſe
They're native all, and will not be conceal'd?
Elſe ſure each charm betrays him, and becomes
An advocate, whoſe ſilent eloquence
Pleads 'gainſt thy voice, and foils its tuneful power.
Traitor! was this the face which thy falſe tongue
Profan'd as vulgar? This ſuch common beauty
As the fair eye of Day beheld each hour
In ev'ry clime he lighted? Baſe diſſembler,
This inſtant quit our realm.

ELFRIDA.

Oh ſtay thee, EDGAR,
And once more hear me. At thy feet I fall
As earneſt, and diſtreſt a ſupplicant,
As e'er embrac'd the knees of Majeſty.
Oh! ſpare thy Country's guardian, EDGAR, ſpare
Thy cloſeſt, ſureſt friend. Let not one fault,

Cancel

Cancel his thouſand, thouſand acts of faith.
Alas! I fall to vaineſt repetition.
Grief, whelming grief drowns all my faculties,
And leaves me nought but tears.

EDGAR.

Riſe, riſe, ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA.

Shall he then live?

EDGAR.

He ſhall, he ſhall, my fair.
If ſo he quit the realm within the ſpace
Our ſentence limited.

ELFRIDA.

Oh ſtop not there;
That ſentence will be death to ATHELWOLD.
Think, for thou know'ſt full well his gentle nature,
Can he ſupport the rigour of this doom?
Can he, who liv'd but in thy gracious ſmiles,
Who'd pine, if chance thoſe ſmiles a ſingle hour
Were dealt him thriftily; think, can he bear
The infamy of exile?

EDGAR.

Hear me, ATHELWOLD.
Did I not ſhow'r on thy much-favour'd head
My thickeſt honours, and with gift ſo ready
As out-run all requeſt? Did I not hold thee
Still in ſuch open confidence of friendſhip,
Such love as——

ATHEL-

ATHELWOLD.

Sooner ſtab me than repeat it.

EDGAR.

Yet give me hearing. I repeat not this
To taunt or gall thee. On my ſoul thy worth
Did o'ertop all thoſe honours, and thy zeal
Kept pace with my beſt love. Nor 'till this Deed—
But ſuch a deed! look there, look on that face.
Thou know'ſt me, ATHELWOLD, has ſeen me gaze
On a ſoft yielding fair one, 'till mine eye
Shot flames. Perdition ſeize me, if this heart
Knew Love 'till now.

ATHELWOLD.

I ſee it plain, my Liege,
Nor ſay I aught to leſſen my Offence.
No, here I kneel, Oh! caſt but on my mis'ry
One kind forgiving glance; this ready ſword
Shall expiate all.

ELFRIDA.

Ah! will you? muſt he die?

EDGAR.

No, ſtay thee, ATHELWOLD, and ſheath thy ſword;
I never yet (ſave but this hour of rage)
Deem'd thee my ſubject. Thou wert ſtill my friend;
And, injur'd as I am, thou ſtill art ſuch:
I do forego the word; to baniſh thee
Or ſeal thy death, tranſcends a friend's juſt right,

ELFRIDA.

Ah gen'rous deed! ah godlike goodneſs! Virgins,
The king will pardon him. Wake each high note
Of praiſe, and gratitude, teach EDGAR's name
To Harewood's furtheſt Echo. Oh my Sov'reign!
What words can ſpeak my thanks—

EDGAR.

Nay, check theſe tranſports,
Leſt, if I ſee thee thus, my ſoul forget
Its milder purpoſe. I will leave thee, Lady;
Yet firſt my lips muſt preſs this gentle hand,
And breathe one ſoft ſigh of no common fervour.
Now on, my Lords—Fair wonder of thy ſex,
Adieu. We'll ſtraight unto our realm of Mercia.
Yet firſt, as was our purpoſe, thro' this foreſt,
We'll chace the nimble Roebuck; may the ſport
More pleaſe us, than we hope. Earl ATHELWOLD,
Thou too muſt join our train. Follow us ſtraight.

[*Exit Edgar, &c.*

ATHELWOLD.

I do, my Liege. ELFRIDA, I have much
For thy lov'd ear, and have but one farewell
To tell it all—And yet—

ELFRIDA.

Ah loiter not,
It may enrage. Farewel. Be ſure, take heed
I come not in your talk; avoid ev'n thinking;
Check ev'n the ſighs of abſence. Haſte, my Earl,
Oh haſte thee, as thou lov'ſt thy conſtant wife.

[*Exit Athelwold.*

ORGAR,

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ORGAR.

Thy conſtant Wife! ah, ſtain of all thy race,
Degen'rate Girl! Henceforth be ORGAR deem'd
Of ſoft, and dove-like temper, who could ſee
A child of his ſtoop to ſuch vile abaſement,
And yet forbore juſt wrath; forbore to draw
That blood ſhe had defil'd from her mean veins.
But ſure thou art not mine; ſome Elf or Fay
Did ſpirit away my babe, and by curſt charms
Thee in her cradle plac'd. Nay hang not on me.
Dry, dry thy tears, they've done their office amply.
EDGAR has pardon'd him. No, by my Earldom,
I cannot think of majeſty thus meanly.
He'll yet avenge it: What if chance he ſhould not?
That ſtops not me; I have a heart, an arm,
A ſword can do me juſtice.

ELFRIDA.

Ah! my Lord,
Are you ſtill mercileſs? Alas, I hop'd——

ORGAR.

What could'ſt thou hope, ELFRIDA? couldſt thou think
I e'er would pardon his vile perfidy,
Or thy ignoble ſoftneſs?

ELFRIDA.

Deareſt Father,
Frown not thus ſternly on me. I would fain
Touch

Touch your relenting ſoul, fain win your heart
To fatherly forgiveneſs. For thro' life
I've oft had pleaſing proof how that forgiveneſs
Stoop'd to my fond perſuaſion. But I fear
Perſuaſion now has left me. My ſad thoughts
Are all on wing, all following ATHELWOLD,
Like unſeen miniſtring ſpirits:—Pardon, Sir,
That frown ſhall check me, I'll not mention him;
I will but plead for my own weakneſs, plead
For that ſoft ſympathy of ſoul, which you
Deem baſe and ſervile. Baſe perhaps it might be,
Were I of bolder ſex. But I, alas!—
Ah pardon me, if Nature ſtampt me Woman;
Gave me a heart ſoft, gentle, prone to pity,
And very fearful. Fearful, ſure with cauſe
At this dread hour, when if one hapleſs word,
One ſigh break forth unbid, it may rekindle
The monarch's rage—What has my phrenzy ſaid?
I've wander'd from my meaning. Deareſt Virgins,
My raſh tongue more inflames him. Oh aſſiſt me,
Ye are not thus oppreſt with inward horrour:
Kneel, plead, perſuade, convince——

CHORUS.

Alas, my miſtreſs,
What may a ſervant's accents do t'appeaſe
This furious Earl?

ORGAR.

Ye well may ſpare them: Maidens,
Know my firm ſoul's reſolv'd, and be my heart

As baſe as ATHELWOLD's, if it foregoes
The honeſt reſolution. Think what I,
What Britain ſuffers from this Traitor's fraud:
Had EDGAR took my daughter to his bed,
Our Britiſh Line, which now is doom'd to ſink
In vile ſubjection, had again aſſum'd
The pall of royalty, with half its power,
In time perchance the whole. But this falſe Saxon
Shall with his life repay me. Here I'll wait
His firſt return, and in his own domain
Give him fair combat. I have known the time
When this good arm had hardihood enough
For thrice his proweſs. What is loſt thro' age,
My juſt cauſe ſhall ſupply; and he ſhall fall
As did the traitor OSWALD, whoſe bold tongue
Defam'd me to King ATHELSTAN: To the ground
My ſharp lance nail'd the caitiff.

[*Exit Orgar.*

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

——— Think, my Lord,
Will ATHELWOLD, will he enter thoſe liſts,
Where conqueſt would be parricide? Alas,
He hears me not. Go, thou obdurate Man.
A daughter's tears will but the more provoke thee.
I will not follow him. No, poor ELFRIDA!
All thou can'ſt do is here to ſtand, and weep,
And feel that thou art wretched.

CHORUS,

CHORUS.

Dearest Mistress,
Restrain this flood of tears, perhaps——

ELFRIDA.

Perhaps!
Ah! mock me not with hopes.

CHORUS.

We do not mean it:
For Hope, tho' 'tis pale Sorrow's only cordial,
Has yet a dull and opiate quality,
Enfeebling what it lulls. It suits not you;
For, as we fear——

ELFRIDA.

Do you too fear? Alas!
I flatter'd my poor soul that all its Fears
Were Grief's distemper'd coinage, that my Love
Rais'd causeless apprehensions, and at length
EDGAR would quite forgive. I do bethink me,
My joy broke forth too rashly. When they left us,
His safety was not half secur'd; my pleading
Was not half heard; I should have follow'd EDGAR,
Claim'd more full pardon, forc'd him to embrace
My sorrowing Lord.

CHORUS.

We fear that sorrow more
Than EDGAR's rage. We fear his fallen Virtue.
Self-condemnation works most strongly on him,
Ev'n to Despondency. Ev'n at his pardon,

No joy flush'd on his cheek; we mark'd him well,
He shew'd no sign of welcome. No, he took it
As who should say, "To give me aught but Death
"Is a poor boon unwish'd and unaccepted."
Too much we fear he'll do some impious Act—

ELFRIDA.

What, on his life? I thought I had explor'd
Each various face of danger: this escap'd me.
How miss'd I this? It suits his courage highly;
Suits too his fix'd remorse.—But yet he will not,
No, ATHELWOLD, thou wilt not kill ELFRIDA.

CHORUS.

Oh may his love preserve him: may these shades
Receive him soon in peace. To this blest end
You sure should strive to calm your Father's rage;
At least not suffer him, as now, retir'd
To brood o'er his revenge. For know, ELFRIDA,
Beneath the silent gloom of Solitude
Tho' Peace can sit and smile; tho' meek Content
Can keep the chearful tenor of her soul,
Ev'n in the loneliest shades; yet let not Wrath
Approach, let black Revenge keep far aloof,
Or soon they flame to Madness.

ELFRIDA.

True, my Virgins;
Attend me then: I'll try each winning art:
Tho' ill such art becomes me, yet I'll aim it.—
Hark—whence that noise? I heard some hasty foot-steps.

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

Oh Heav'ns! 'tis EDWIN.

ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

EDWIN, ah! that look
Beſpeaks too well the horrour of thy errand.
Tell it me all.

EDWIN.

Alas!——

ELFRIDA.

Nay, do not pauſe.
Tell it me all. I think it will not kill me.
Repeat each circumſtance. I'm ready, EDWIN,
Ev'n for the worſt.

EDWIN.

Then hear that worſt, ELFRIDA.
Soon as the ſtag had left yon weſtward thicket,
The King diſmiſs'd his Lords, each ſeveral ways,
To their beſt ſport, bidding Earl ATHELWOLD,
Lord ARDULPH, and myſelf, attend his perſon.
Thus parted from the reſt, the Monarch pierc'd
A darkling dell, which open'd in a Lawn
Thick ſet with elm around. Suddenly here
He turn'd his ſteed, and cry'd, "This place befits
"Our purpoſe well."

ELFRIDA.

Purpoſe! what purpoſe, EDWIN?
'Twas predetermin'd then, diſſembling tyrant!
How could I truſt, or hope——

EDWIN.

Yet give me hearing:
Thus with a grave compoſure, and calm eye,
King EDGAR ſpake. Now hear me, ATHELWOLD;
Thy King has pardon'd this thy trait'rous act:
From all diſloyal baſeneſs to thy prince
Thou ſtand'ſt abſolv'd; yet, know, there ſtill remains
Somewhat to cancel more. As man to man,
As friend to friend, now, ATHELWOLD, I call thee
Straight to defend thy life with thy good ſword.
Nay, anſwer not; defend it gallantly.
If thy arm proſper, this my dying tongue
Shall pardon thee, and bleſs thee. If thou fall'ſt,
Thy parting breath muſt to my right reſign
ELFRIDA's beauties. At the word, both drew,
Both fought; but ATHELWOLD's was ill-play'd paſſion.
He aim'd his falchion at the Monarch's head,
Only to leave his own brave breaſt defenceleſs.
And on the inſtant EDGAR's rapid ſword
Pierc'd my dear maſter's heart. He fell to earth,
And, falling, cry'd, "This wound atones for all,
"EDGAR, thus full aveng'd, will pardon me,
"And my true wife with chaſte, connubial tears,
"Embalm my memory." He ſmil'd, and dy'd.

ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA.

Nay, come not round me, Virgins, nor ſupport me.
I do not ſwoon, nor weep. I call not heav'n
T'avenge my wretchedneſs. I do not wiſh
This tyrant's hand may wither with cold palſies.
No, I am very patient. Heav'n is juſt!
And, when the meaſure of his crimes is full,
Will bare its red right arm, and lance its lightnings,
'Till then, ye elements, reſt; and thou, firm Earth,
Ope not thy yawning jaws, but let this Monſter
Stalk his due time on thine affrighted ſurface.
Yes: let him ſtill go on; ſtill execute
His ſavage purpoſes, and daily make
More widows weep, as I do. Fooliſh Eyes!
Why flow ye thus unbidden? What have tears
To do with grief like mine?

CHORUS.

Help, help, my Siſters,
To bear her to the caſtle.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

ORGAR.

As I paſt,
Methought I heard a ſound of loud lament;
Elfrida, ah!

ELFRIDA.

Is not my father there?
Withhold me not; I'll fall at his dear feet.
Oh Sir! behold your child thus lowly proſtrate;

Avenge

Avenge her wrongs, avenge your poor ELFRIDA,
Your helpleſs, widow'd daughter.

ORGAR.

Widow'd Daughter!
What is he ſlain?

ELFRIDA.

Inhoſpitably butcher'd;
The Tyrant's ſavage ſelf—Stand you thus cool?
Where is the Britiſh ſpirit, where the fire
Of Belin's race?——Oh fooliſhneſs of grief!
Alas, I had forgot; had EDGAR ſpar'd him,
That ſword, to which my madneſs call'd for vengeance,
Ere long was meant to do the bloody deed,
And make the murder parricide. Have I
No friend to do me right?

ORGAR.

Thou haſt, my Child;
I am thy friend, thy father. Truſt my care.
EDWIN, a word. Retire, my deareſt Daughter;
Virgins, conduct her in.

ELFRIDA.

My Father, No;
What do you do? I muſt not be withheld,
I'll to yon bloody grove, and claſp my Huſband,
My murder'd Huſband. Why reſtrain me, Sir?
Can my ſad eye dart fire thro' his cold breaſt,
And light up life anew?

ORGAR.

ORGAR.

Go in, my child,
And ſeek Tranquillity.

ELFRIDA.

Tranquillity!
I know her well; ſhe is Death's pale-ey'd ſiſter;
She's now in yonder grove cloſing the lids
Of my poor ATHELWOLD. That office done,
She'll bear his ſoul upon her gentle plumes
Up to the realms of Joy. I'll follow them:
I know he'd have it ſo: He'll not be bleſt,
Ev'n on his throne of bliſs, till I am with him.

CHORUS.

This way, my deareſt Miſtreſs.

ELFRIDA.

Hold; nay hold;
Croud not around me. Let me pauſe a while.
ALBINA, thou alone ſhalt join my mis'ry;
I've much to utter to thy friendly ear.
Lead on, thou gentle maid; thy ſingle arm
Shall prop my trembling frame; thy ſingle voice
Speak peace to my afflictions.

[*Exit with the principal Virgin.*

ORGAR, EDWIN, SEMICHORUS.

ORGAR.

On your lives,
Virgins, let no diſturbing ſtep approach her.

Say, EDWIN (for I gueſs 'twas you that brought
Theſe tidings hither) where was royal EDGAR,
When late you left him?

EDWIN.

At my maſter's ſide
Repentant of the ſtroke.

ORGAR.

Comes he not back
To Harewood?

SEMICHORUS.

Heav'n forbid! ELFRIDA's brain
Would madden at the ſight.

ORGAR.

Miſtake not, Virgins;
I did not mean at this diſtreſsful hour
The King ſhould ſee my daughter.

SEMICHORUS.

No, for pity,
Do not profane this ſabbath of her grief.
Oh! be her ſorrow ſacred!

ORGAR.

Fear not, Virgins;
Her peace is my beſt care, and, to enſure it,
I'll haſte this inſtant, by young EDWIN's guidance,
To find the Monarch. Some four miles from Harewood
Stands old Earl EGBERT's caſtle, my faſt friend.

With

With him will I perſuade the King to ſojourn,
'Till my child's grief abate, that too to ſpeed
Be it your buſineſs, Virgins. Watching ever
Each happy interval, when your ſoft tongues
May hint his praiſes, 'till by practice won
She bear their fuller blazon. ELFRID's welfare
Requires this friendly office at your hands;
And EDGAR's virtues bear ſuch genuine luſtre,
That Truth itſelf directs.

[*Exit Orgar.*

SEMICHORUS.

As Truth directs,
So only ſhall we act. This day has ſhewn
What dire effects await its violation.
Straight is the road of Truth, and plain;
And, tho' acroſs the ſacred way
Ten thouſand erring footſteps ſtray,
'Tis ours to walk direct,
And, with ſage caution circumſpect,
Pace ſlowly through the ſolemn ſcene.

[*The principal Virgin returns.*

SEMICHORUS.

Has ORGAR left the grove?

SEMICHORUS.

He has, my ſiſter.

SEMICHORUS.

Then hear, and aid ELFRIDA's laſt reſolve,
Who takes the only way ſtern Fate has left

To ſave her plighted faith for ever pure
To her dead ATHELWOLD.

SEMICHORUS.

Forbid it, Patience;
Forbid it, that ſubmiſſive calm of ſoul,
Which teaches meek-ey'd Piety to ſmile
Beneath the ſcourge of Heav'n.

SEMICHORUS.

Ye need not fear it,
She means not ſelf-deſtruction. Thanks to heav'n,
Huge and o'erbearing as her mis'ry is,
It cannot ſo oblit'rate from her breaſt
The written rule of duty. Her pure Soul
Means, on the inſtant, to devote itſelf
To heav'n and holineſs. Aſſiſt her ſtraight,
Leſt EDGAR's preſence, and her Father's rage
Prevent the bleſt intention. See, ſhe comes.
Kneel on each ſide, devoutly kneel around her;
And breathe ſome pray'r in high and ſolemn ſtrains,
That Angels from their thrones of light may hear,
And ratify her vow.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

[*Elfrida kneels, and the Virgins divide into two Troops.*]

SEMICHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from theſe nether thrones of Light;
And Oh! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your ſolemn flight

Up

Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conſpicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

ELFRIDA.

Hear firſt, that ATHELWOLD's ſad widow ſwears
To rear a hallow'd Convent o'er the place,
Where ſtream'd his blood; there will ſhe weep thro'
Life
Immur'd with this chaſte throng of Virgins; there
Each day ſhall ſix times hear her full-voic'd Choir
Chant the ſlow requiem o'er her martyr'd Lord;
There too, when Midnight low'rs with awful gloom,
She'll riſe obſervant of the ſtated call
Of waking Grief, bear the dim livid taper
Along the winding iſles, and at the altar
Kiſs ev'ry pale ſhrine with her trembling lips,
Preſs the cold ſtone with her bent knee, and call
On ſainted ATHELWOLD.

SEMICHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from theſe nether thrones of Light;
And Oh! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your ſolemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conſpicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

ELFRIDA.

Hear next, that ATHELWOLD's ſad widow ſwears
Never to violate the holy vow

She

She to his truth first plighted; swears to bear
The sober singleness of Widowhood
To her cold grave. If from this chaste resolve
She ev'n in thought should swerve; if gaudy pomp,
Or flatt'ring greatness e'er should tempt one wish
To stray beyond this purpose; may that heav'n,
Which hears this vow, punish its violation,
As heav'nly justice ought.

CHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of Light;
And Oh! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

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FINIS.